

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WASHINGTON, DC – The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) is pleased to announce the recipients of the second annual Joseph R. Crapa Fellowship program.

“USCIRF is proud to welcome this impressive group of scholars whose wide array of experiences and knowledge will contribute to our goal of advancing religious freedom while also honoring the memory of Joseph R. Crapa,” said Leonard Leo, USCIRF chair.

A committed public servant, Mr. Crapa guided USCIRF with consummate skill, combining a keen sense of public service with an abiding commitment to advancing the cause of religious freedom. During his tenure as Executive Director, he helped USCIRF amplify its voice and broaden its reach.

Before joining USCIRF, Mr. Crapa spent a year as chief of staff to Sen. Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.). Earlier, he held legislative and public affairs positions with the Agency for International Development and the Environmental Protection Agency. He was chief of staff for Rep. David R. Obey (D-Wis.) from 1987 to 1997, the last three years as Democratic counsel to the House Appropriations Committee. He served as USCIRF’s Executive Director from 2002 until his untimely death in 2007.

The biographies of the 2010-2011 Crapa Fellows are as follows:

- Ali Al-Ahmed is director of the Institute for Gulf Affairs in Washington DC, a non-profit research organization. A writer and frequent consultant to major world media outlets including CBS News, CNN, PBS, Fox News, Washington Post, and Associated Press, Mr. Al-Ahmed is an expert on Saudi political affairs. The support of the Fellowship over 12 months will allow Mr. Al-Ahmed to focus on Saudi government textbooks and to conduct an analysis of the key themes found in Saudi textbooks, particularly religious content and other relevant areas.

- Geraldine Fagan is a British journalist who has reported on religious freedom issues in the former Soviet Union, particularly Russia, for over a decade, currently with Forum 18 News Service. With the support of the Crapa Fellowship over 11 months, Ms. Fagan's research will examine attitudes towards religious freedom among Muslim youth in the North Caucasus and the path taken to violence by key figures in the region's new generation of insurgents, as well as inform U.S. foreign policy on the role of religious freedom when interacting with dissident Islamic groups.

- Ziya Meral is a researcher, writer and a PhD candidate in Politics at the University of Cambridge. Mr. Meral has extensive field research experience in the Middle East, especially in Iran, Egypt and Turkey. The support of the Fellowship over 12 months will help Mr. Meral develop a policy model for states that see recurrent patterns of ethno-religious violence, particularly between Muslim and Christian groups.

USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission. USCIRF Commissioners are appointed by the President and the leadership of both political parties in the Senate and the House of Representatives. USCIRF's principal responsibilities are to review the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally and to make policy recommendations to the President, Secretary of State and Congress.

To interview a USCIRF Commissioner, contact Tom Carter, Communications Director tcarter@uscirf.gov, or (202) 523-3257.